Ex-Editor Cites JAMA Coercion

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Chicago — The recently fired editor of the Journal of the American Medical Association said he battled almost daily with American Medical Association leaders, members and lobbyists to retain editorial independence.

In an interview published in yesterday's Chicago Tribune, Dr. George Lundberg said he and his staff endured constant pressure, including threats and intimidation, during his 17 years running the journal.

"I don't think a day went by in considering what to publish that I and my editorial staff didn't have to worry about offending AMA members, AMA politicians and the AMA Washington office by what we published," Lundberg said.

Pressure came in the form of telephone calls from irate AMA members and letters from state medical societies and AMA officers "threatening political action against the editor and the journal for publishing what offended them ideologically or, more likely, imposed on [physicians'] ability to earn money," Lundberg said. He did not discuss specific incidents.

AMA Executive Vice President E. Ratcliffe Anderson Jr. fired Lundberg Jan. 15 after JAMA published a survey of college students' sexual attitudes that coincided with President Bill Clinton's impeachment trial. Anderson said the article inappropriately interjected the organization into a political debate.

Later, the AMA and Lundberg reached an agreement that will let him contribute articles to the publication.

Lundberg said AMA public relations staffers tried to obtain copies of JAMA articles prior to publication so they could "spin them for the AMA's corporate interests."

He said he resisted the intimidation and received strong support from the JAMA editorial board when he was there.

"The editor's job is to edit the journal for patients," he said.

Dr. Richard M. Glass, an interim co-editor of JAMA since Lundberg's firing, didn't deny that some people want to control the medical journal's content.

"Dr. Lundberg describes attempts to influence the content of JAMA. There certainly were those," Glass said yesterday. "But those attempts didn't succeed."

In a joint statement issued yesterday, Glass and co-editor Dr. Phil Fontanarosa said they continue to have final say about the content of news releases about upcoming JAMA articles.

The statement also said AMA officials have not tried "to interfere with any aspect of the editorial and publication processes" since Glass and Fontanarosa were named to their positions.

Lundberg, 65, commutes weekly to Harvard University, where he is an adjunct professor of health policy. He also is a lecturer at Northwestern University's medical and journalism schools.

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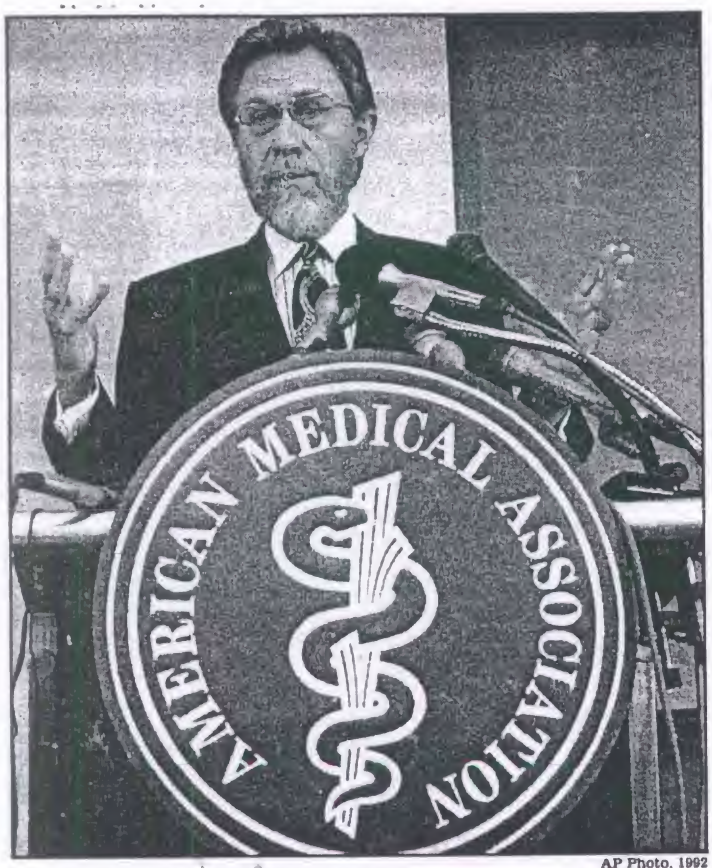

AP Photo, 1992

Lundberg, recently fired JAMA editor, says he was frequently harassed by AMA factions.